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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 003190

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/17/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [IT](#) [IRAQI](#) [FREEDOM](#)

SUBJECT: BLAIR-BERLUSCONI VACATION-VISIT CONTINUES - NO  
TRUTH TO PRESS REPORTS THAT ITALY WILL ASSUME MEDIATING  
ROLE IN AL-NAJAF

Classified By: POL M/C Tom Countryman for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Prime Ministers Berlusconi and Blair and their wives continue to enjoy their vacation at Berlusconi's home in Sardinia. Italian press has reported extensively on their activities. Despite speculation from throughout the Italian media that the PMs discussed a role for Italy as "mediator" between the US and insurgents at Al-Najaf, we have confirmed that the Government of Italy has no interest in acting in such a capacity. One of Berlusconi's deputy-diplomatic advisors, who is in regular contact with senior staff with Berlusconi in Sardinia, emphasized that Italy does of course support a peaceful conclusion to the fighting and loss of life in Al-Najaf, but that this must come about by Al-Sadr and his supporters laying down their arms. He pointed out that the fighting is an internal Iraqi issue and any request for mediation or "good offices" would have to be made by the Iraqi government.

¶12. (C) We believe that the ever-inventive Italian press, looking to enliven an otherwise slow summer season for news, has seized upon a statement issued yesterday by a Vatican spokesperson indicating that "if asked, the Holy Father will willingly agree" to mediate in Al-Najaf. Putting two and two together and making six, the press is most likely extending such a possibility to the two leaders vacationing in Sardinia. Adding fuel to the media fire was the fact that the PMs had a telephone conversation with President Bush, notwithstanding the fact that neither the Prime Ministers' nor the White House's statements on the call mentioned anything about mediation.

¶13. (U) The US Embassy to the Holy See will report septel on the Vatican's position on this issue.

BAGHDAD MINIMIZE CONSIDERED

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